Relevance of Gandhi in Politics

Dr. Deepika Dhand

Pro-vice Chancellor MATS University

deepikadhand@ymail.com

Abstract

Almost seven decades after Mahatma Gandhi passed away and India became independent from the British rule on 15th August 1947, Gandhi's ideologies are put in practice across the world. "Even if India forgets the world will remember him", Ramachandra Guha, the historian remarks. As a social reformer and political thinker, he won over the enmity of Muslim and Hindu bigots. Ramachandra Guha repeats the narrative of Richard Atten Borough's "1982 biopic Gandhi". On the one hundred and fiftieth centenary Gandhi followed the principles of self-rule (Swaraj), religious tolerance, rule of law and civil disobedience (Satyagraha).

The biographical volumes written by Ramachandra Guha visualize him as a liberal icon. As a student of law in London, Gandhi believed in right to equality. Studying India's political past, Gandhi was against social discrimination. As a lawyer in South Africa returning to India at the beginning of the first world war, Gandhi worked against the evils of the caste system.

Gandhi focused on the development of India as an agrarian economy. He was an active member of the Indian National Congress. The rights of Citizenship were granted by the Civil Rights movement in the US in the 1950's and 1960's; adopting the universal adult franchise proposed by Gandhi. Following the scriptures from the Holy Quran, the Bible and the Gita; Gandhi praised Prophet Mohammed. He pleaded that all Indians should live in harmony and brotherhood with Hindus, Christians, Muslims and Parsees alike.

Keywords:

Self-rule, Swaraj, Religious tolerance, Satygraha, Civil disobedience, Right to citizenship, Caste system, Agrarian economy, Civil rights movement, Universal adult franchise, Social discrimination, Right to equality, Caste system

Introduction

Mohan Das Karamchand Gandhi is honoured all over the world as a 'Mahatma', known as 'Bapu' in India (1869-1948). He embarked as a patriot, a freedom fighter, social reformer and an activist dedicated to the cause of India's independence aspiring to acquire freedom for India peacefully and legally. A man of letters, writing all his speeches himself, the many volumes of his book "Experiments with truth" show that he was over-awed by the indigenous traditions of non-violence nurtured by the Russian Leo Tolstoy, John Ruskin (English) and the American Henry David Thoreau. Mahatma Gandhi received his law degree from the University of London and was invited to the Bar at the age of twenty-two. Albert Einstein asserted "generations to come will scarce believe that such a man as this, ever in flesh and blood walked upon this earth".

Historians and Indian biographers like Dinanath Gopal Tendulkar, Pyarelal Nayar, and Ramachandra Guha have written books which project him as a guardian of liberty and freedom, Gandhi was acclaimed as a vulnerable young student guided by the virtues of non-violent civil disobedience (not pacifism). As a student of law in London, he surprised the English countrymen by disagreeing against the concept of racial discrimination. Returning to South Africa as a lawyer in 1915, during the beginning of the first world war, Ramachandra Guha propounded a fast moving undertaking in modern India whose religious politics should not be in conflict to peace, progress and prosperity. Gandhiji proposed to turn the Indian National Congress into a mass-based political party by paying particular attention to the farmers and agriculture in the country.

Gandhi's ideas have evolved and play a similar role of non-violence, truth and Satyagraha. Gandhi's innovation and acceptance to the values of human rights, humanity and tolerance had a deep impact on the freedom struggle. Gandhi was deeply influenced by the **Vaishnava movement**, the practices of the Bhagwat Gita in daily life, the verses from the Bible; John Ruskin's novels 'Un to the last' and the books written by Emerson Thoreau and Leo Tolstoy. These movements, condemned violence and were popularized among all sections of society, socialists, lawyers, peasants, craftsmen and the industrialists. Martin Luther King and his people used the ideology of 'Satyagraha' to make the American government ashamed of the unjust racial legislation. The Soviet controlled Europe led by Lech Walesa Vaclav Havel undertook a peaceful non-violent method to attain freedom. The National league of Democracy with Aung Saan Suu Ki as its head and Dalai Lama brought **about Tibetan autonomy through peaceful means**. Democracy and

Pluralism was restored to Myanmar and China, as non-violent people sacrificed their lives. Gandhi sowed the seeds to protest against unjust laws against authoritarian laws non-violently. Gandhiji's personal secretary, Mahadev Desai supported Gandhiji's views and opinions which echoed in every street, every state, every country even before the digital technological divide. Gandhi advised Bhagat Singh that he should stop violence as it would beget more violence. He advised to use the moral force of non-violence to oust the British. The leftists recognized the moral and spiritual power of Gandhi's moral and spiritual greatness. The rightists however tried to assimilate him as a Hindu saint.

In his autobiography, Gandhiji reveals his anger and humiliation towards the **Jalliawala Bagh by tragedy publicly** announcing, "In Amritsar innocent men and women were made to crawl like worms on their bellies…….it was their massacre principally that attracted the attention of the people of India and the world". **S. A. T Rowlatt** announced the anarchical and revolutionary crime act known as the Rowlatt Act in 1919 or (the black act) which was a structure to suppress the act trials that took place without warrant. The purpose of the Act was to curb the ever increasing nationalist movement in the country. Gandhi called upon the people to do Satyagraha against such an oppressive **Act. Mohammed Ali Jinnah,** member of the Indian Muslim League resigned. Gandhi began the **Dandi March (12th March to 6th April) from Sabarmati Ashram to Dandi in Nausari district in Ahmedabad breaking the salt law by making salt** on 6th April 1930. **Gandhi Irwin Pact** took place in London 1931 when the Indian National Conference refused to take part. Mahatma Gandhi delivered the acronym of "do or die" emphasizing an action and peaceful tradition without destroying the environments and sustaining resources for future generations making the earth a better place to live in, Gandhi analyzed (as Machiavelli, the political thinker) the means are equally important justifying sustainable political, social and economic systems. In Gandhi led country widespread programme for reducing poverty propagating the rights of women intensifying religious norms and values, finishing untouchability to attain Swaraj or self-rule. Gandhiji believed in vegetarianism which he thought of as a moral movement. Most vegetarians were member of the **Theosophical society** which was founded in 1875.

The Legacy of Satyagraha

The ideology of Satyagraha was adopted by Gandhi which literally combines two words 'Satya' meaning truth and 'graha' meaning force. The essence of Satyagraha was infused through a strong spiritual ethos contained by Gandhiji since the launching of this movement (Satyagraha). Satyagraha or Civil Disobedience was used against the compulsory registration for Indians in **1906.** In **1907** and in **1910** it was declared against unjust emigration in S. Africa. Thereafter, Satyagraha has been a successful weapon for acquiring freedom from the imperialist power, all over the world and the following years to come. Gandhi's political ideology, laid the foundation of the theological **tenets of Jainism, Buddhism**, **Upanishads and the Bhagwat Gita**. The inner engineered spiritually developed Gandhi into a Mahatma dedicated to truth, chastity, non-attachment and hard-work. On the political front, Satyagraha possessed techniques of non-violent measures to curb the opponent and ideally to convert the opponent rather than to coerce him into submission. Gandhi was victorious in the revolutions he led in South Africa by following the path of Satyagraha. He believed strongly that it would succeed in India too. In fact, Gandhi had an innate belief that it would be the only effective way to fight the powerful British regime, because two centuries of colonial rule had financially and morally emasculated India to such a degree, that centuries of colonial rule had financially and morally emasculated India to such a degree, that any other form of resistance was bound to fail. Gandhi's methods of Satyagraha were not so popular. Krishna Gokhale, advocated Gandhi's method of Satyagraha at the indigo planters' revolution at Champaran, in Bihar. At the international fellowship of religions which was held in **Sabarmati** in **January 1928** he said, "we can only pray as we are Hindus, not that a Christian should become a Hindu, or if we are Mussalman not that a Hindu as a Christian should become a Mussalman". We can only pray, if we are Hindu or a Christian should become a Mussalman, we should secretly pray that anyone be a better Hindu, a Muslim a better Muslim and a Christian a better Christian. That is the fundamental **truth of fellowship**. Poland's history by far is dependent on the thoughts of **civil disobedience** which can be found in **Sophocles** '**Antigone**'. The **revolutions of 1989** produced literature influenced by the values of civil disobedience. **Gandhiji's understanding campaigned for social equality, humanity, morality, social, religious and caste considerations**. The African National Congress having been founded in 1912 saw many disputes due to the impact of decades of mass struggle. Freedom and Justice was maintained with reconciliation bringing the message of Gandhi to the forefront. N. Mandela, King Havel and Dalai

Lama followed Gandhi's ideas. Dhirendra Mujumdar his friend asserted that Gandhi's ideology was to be adapted as aa **way of life**. Martin Luther king stated that Gandhi lived, thought and acted inspired by the vision of a humanity evolving towards world peace and harmony. We may ignore him only at our own risk. The democratic movements reached out to the freedom fighters of **Tunisia Syria.**

The major movement of Mahatma Gandhi where he adapted the policies of Satyagraha or civil disobedience were: -

- Champaran Satyagraha 1917 (where the indigo cultivators become miserable under 'Tinkathiya system'). Here Indians were forced to sell indigo at a very cheap prize.
- Kheda Satyagraha (1917-18) no-tax campaign started by Mohan Lal Pandey, Vallabhbhai Patel and Indulal Yagnik demanding the remission of taxes.
- Khalifat movement (1919) was started by the Ali brothers to highlight the protest against Turkey during the First World war 1914-1918.
- Non-Cooperation movement (1920) began as a violation against the Jalliawala Bagh massacre.

Gandhi was a cosmopolitan thinker and a shrewd Hindu politician. The lessons of the caste system were learnt by **B.R. Ambedkar**. Like minded leaders like Rabindranath Tagore, Nehru, Valabhbhai Patel, Rajaji and J.B. Kriplani build up a team of similar ideals. They described Gandhi as a 'philosophical' anarchist upholding and maintaining social relations by sacrificing and, protecting truth at the cost of life. Ramachandra Guha worships his hero by projecting his ideals to "normal times, normal places and against normal rulers" stabilizing colonial issues contrasting them with Nazism as an exception. As philosopher, Michael Oakes emanates an ideology to be "The formalized abridgment of the supposed sub-stratum of rational truth contained in the Indian traditions" just as Gandhi's ideology of truth and non-violence. Gandhi sternly believed in keeping the environment clean and hygienic and encouraging everyone to keep laboratories clean. Gandhi encouraged inter-religious marriages. All societies should be treated as one community, he said giving incentives to cottage industries. This would ensure employment and remove poverty.

Swaraj/Self-rule

Swaraj or self-rule propagates governance by self-rule by building a society/community through **decentralization** and religious pluralism. He believed that the highest divine power is all one for humanity all over the world. Jawaharlal Nehru proclaimed that the "light is gone and yet it will shine for a thousand years". Soon after Gandhi's assassination. **Dada Dharmadkari** one of the greatest interpreters of Gandhian ideology said there is nothing like 'ism' with Gandhi, Gandhian philosophy of 'self-rule' or Swaraj is akin to the prologue to John Wycliffe in the Bible. "As asserted by Abraham Lincoln a government is a rule of the people, by the people and for the people". The demand for Swaraj implicates a justiciable change to reorient oneself in the capacity of **self-respect, self-sacrifice, self-control** and above all self-realization, to rise peacefully against any enmity. In Gandhi's book 'Hind Swaraj' (1909). Gandhiji explained "wanting (systems of) English rule without the Englishmen; the tiger's nature but not the tiger". This indicated that India was ready for regaining control of the self-respect and self-responsibility, liberating India to attain self-rule spiritually. The Indian National Congress on 19th December 1929 declared "Purna Swaraj", Independence day was celebrated in advance, when the members of the Indian National Congress and the officials of the British Raj demanded **Dominion status**. The Swadeshi movement aimed to strip apart the power of the British empire boycotting British products making the Swadeshi movement a remarkable strategy L.M. Bhole divides the Swadeshi movement into five phases.

- 1850-1904 advocated by Dada Bhai Naroji, Gokhale, Ranade Tilak, G.V Jashi and Bhagwat k. Nigami was the first Swadeshi movement.
- 1905 to 1917 due to partition of Bengal ordered by Lord Cruzan.
- 1918-1947 accompanied by the rise of Indian industrialists.
- 1948-1991 wide-spread curbs permits and licenses were issued.
- 1991- liberalization, privatization and globalization took place.

'Political Azadi'(independence) from the British rule was pleaded that is true liberation and self-rule. New and fresh administrative policies were expected suiting the needs of the common people in India stricken in poverty, unemployment and diversity. This paved the beginning of the betterment of its people. Gandhi states, "it is Swaraj when we learn to rule ourselves". The Swadeshi movement was an essential part of Indian Independence. This included boycotting

British products, revival and manufacturing of domestic products and production processes. The popularity of 'khadi' still stands at the forefront. Gandhi thereafter were a khadi **loin cloth (short dhoti)** woven with yarn spun on the '**charkha**' or traditional Indian spinning wheel. Born fire protests included the burning of all foreign goods took place in every street. Many startups of Indian handloom have hit the foreign markets. The Swadeshi Team Navigation Company (SSNC) was the primary shipping company set up in 1906. Gandhi's ashrams today are visited as pilgrimages at Sabarmati, Champaran etc. The scenes and photographs depicting his journey are portrayed where he was turned from a barrister, hailing from a 'Baniya' Brahman family, from Gujrat to a 'half naked fakir'. He is symbolic of rising every morning only to spin 'Swadesh', cotton cloth on the 'Charkha' as a ritual and as a religious and patriotic duty. His ascetic characteristics expose him to be a fanatic eccentric saint or a messiah reactionary revolutionist who was always under risk to be jailed and loose his life for the course of freedom.

Mahatma Gandhi was assassinated on 30th January 1948 in **Birla House.** Nathuram Godse, a believer of Hindu nationalism and member of Hindu Mahasabha and Rastriya Swayam Sevak Sang (RSS) shot him. After his death Gandhi's voice and ideals are heard all over the globe. The things he wore like round spectacles, walking stick, loin cloth and other frugal elements are all preserved and exhibited in Ghandhi's Museums in India. The stained blood on his body by the three bullets he was shot, have all been preserved. This only elevates him to be a martyr – like a god, similar to the martyrdom of Jesus Christ.

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